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ARISTOCRATIC DRIFT OF AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM.

WHEN the English Church first reared an altar beside the James River in the little settlement which the fortune-hunters of England established with such difficulty, there were no marked differences of rank amongst the men who knelt before it. Few were there who were not of gentle birth when the colony was founded, but, some years later, when the population was less homogeneous, we may be very sure that within the sanctuary walls regard was had for him who could wear the gay clothing and the gold ring, rather than for him whose plain speech and plain garb proclaimed him simple instead of gentle. The men who founded Boston and Plymouth were of a different stamp from their Virginian brethren. Sturdy, hard-headed men of the middle class, one might have expected that in the temples which they should build, no artificial distinctions of rank would be allowed. Yet very soon we find them, in their rude meeting-houses, exalting the Christian who possessed two cloaks and had everything handsome about him, so far as was possible under existing circumstances, above the Christian who did not possess extraneous advantages. A few years later we find a similar state of affairs among the Dutch worshipers at New Amsterdam, the gay clothing and the gold ring once more being rewarded with chief seats in the synagogues.

Two hundred and fifty years have gone by, and the world has made more progress in that time, we are told, than in many cycles of Cathay. Year by year Protestantism has eliminated one harsh feature after another from its statements of belief, and has adapted itself more and more nearly to the needs of humanity, it is claimed. The rude meeting-houses of the colonial period have given place to costly churches, it is true. Inside of these temples the light, passing with difficulty through painted glass, reveals an interior filled with carefully upholstered seats, where the foot falls

upon the softest carpets, and where the pealing organ swells the note of self-gratulation.

"The Lord is in His holy temple," says the clergyman, "let all the earth keep silence before Him." But is "all the earth" present, in this house of the Lord's? The wearers of gay clothing and gold rings seem to be in the majority here. How should it be otherwise? Purple and fine linen can readily pay one, two, three, or even four thousand dollars for the privilege of presenting itself before God in what is termed His house, and what fellowship can Christianity in velvet and broadcloth have for Christianity in less seemly garb?

But the plain, unfashionable people would not feel at home amongst us, say the wearers of the gay clothing. They naturally prefer to be by themselves. This is true enough, and so fashionable Christianity builds a mission church for unfashionable Christianity and its Sunday meditations are not therefore disturbed by any Dives and Lazarus contrasts being thrust before it. Of all the Protestant Churches in America, the writer's own church, the Episcopal, is generally styled the most aristocratic, but its Ritualistic wing has done and is doing much to relieve it from this imputation, and the Ritualistic clergy, as a whole, are little disposed to recognize class distinctions. Next after the Episcopal Church the Unitarian is perhaps the most exclusive, the one farthest removed from sympathy with the spiritual needs of the poor. Following this is the Presbyterian Church and about on the same line are the Congregationalist Church and, where the German traditions are fading, the Lutheran Church. In the light of a poor relation the Episcopal Church is disposed to consider the numerically great Methodist Church, and the Unitarian Church regards the Universalist Church in a similar way. Viewed from a social standpoint the Baptist Church is on the same plane as the Methodist, and in many cities the worshiper at either of these churches is socially dead. In a certain village in Western New York, where the writer once lived, the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches held the balance of social power and the Methodists and Baptists were socially ignored with the exception of one family among the latter. "It must be very trying for the B——s to attend the Baptist Church," was a common saying in the village. It occasionally happens that the dominant church in a town is the Methodist or Baptist, but in the majority of cases social ostracism awaits the

man or woman who belongs to either of these respectable bodies. Society practically assumes that all "the nice people" worship at Episcopal, Presbyterian, Unitarian, Congregationalist or Lutheran shrines, and no doubt society has legitimate grounds for its assumption if its standards are to be accepted. But let us see what is the state of affairs in these humbler Protestant Churches. Are there two Baptist Churches in a town? We may be very sure that one of these is more exclusive than the other. Are there two Methodist Churches in a town? We shall hear that "the better class of Methodists" attend one of these churches in preference to the other. The tolerant Presbyterian or Congregationalist will tell you that "really the better class of Methodists are more like ourselves," which he thinks is a very gracious, liberal-minded statement of the case, and "the better class of Methodists" affect to look down upon the preachers of their plainer co-religionists. Should there be several churches of one faith in any community the scale of respectability may have any number of degrees marked upon it, from the Gothic structure in the fashionable quarter to the mission chapel that has for neighbors saloons and squalid tenements.

The whole fabric of American Protestantism is inwrought with the notion that class distinctions must exist, must be intensified in fact, in the houses it erects to the worship of a Divine Being who is supposed to care nothing for such distinctions and whose Son, when on earth, consorted with fishermen and "the lower classes" generally in preference to the company of "nice people." Honorable exceptions exist here and there without doubt, but the great, stubborn fact remains that American Protestantism does foster an exclusive, aristocratic spirit. The humble mission chapel develops in time into a church. Its settees are replaced at length by cushioned pews; a costly carpet covers the floor that once boasted nothing better than a cocoa matting, an imposing organ succeeds the unpretentious melodeon, the sunlight comes at last through many-colored panes. All these things are certainly sweet and commendable in their nature, for it is surely right to beautify and enrich His temple to the best of our ability, but along with them the spirit of exclusiveness invariably creeps in, and after a time, Lazarus is made to feel that his rags are out of keeping in so fine a place and he is assured that he will feel much more at home in the new mission which the church has been so good as to build for

him. And, once again, gay clothing and gold rings have it all their own way.

But all this is not the fault of Christianity or of American Protestantism, it is simply a fault inherent in human nature, it may be urged. Is this indeed so? Let us see.

A stone's-throw from the Protestant church may often be seen a church surpassing it in beauty, a church whose marbles are carved with even more richness of design, whose windows blaze with even deeper coloring, a church whose existence the Protestant would like to ignore even while he emulates its architecture, but which, when forced upon his notice, he characterizes as the church of the housemaids and Irish laborers.

"The housemaids' and laborers' church!" Heaven be praised that there *is* such a church, for Protestantism has little to offer these members of the community. At the door of this despised church is the holy-water stoup, the use of which is common to all the congregation, its presence at the entrance serving to emphasize the fact that worldly distinctions must be left outside the door. The wearer of the gay clothing and he of the tattered sleeve stand on an equal footing in this sanctuary. Dives and Lazarus kneeling side by side in a Roman Catholic temple is a sight that may often be seen, but the Protestant church-goer rarely beholds such a spectacle in his own church. Whatever the relative merits of the two faiths may be, one must admit that the Roman communion, in America at least, has encouraged, in the majority of cases, the idea of the equality of man in the presence of the Maker he has come to worship, while the Protestant communion has from the beginning fostered an aristocratic, exclusive spirit, which has resulted in making its churches but too often religious club-houses, and in deepening the caste distinctions which practically deny the brotherhood of man.

Say what we may, the Protestant Church has no place for the poor man within its pale. The wealthy churches snub him till he leaves them for unfashionable churches or omits to go to church altogether, and the churches which lay no claim to being fashionable are yet not overgracious to the very poor worshiper who ought to be content with the religious cold victuals proffered his kind at the mission chapel. It would not be pleasant to find a ragged, dirty stranger in our cushioned pew next Sunday. He would certainly be out of place there. These comfortable seats be for well-

nurtured, well-dressed Christians who have listened approvingly to the Gospel all their lives, and who are very far from hungering and thirsting for the Bread of Life. Away with you, Lazarus, to the mission chapel where you belong ! You shall hear a tenth-rate preacher there whom you can better understand, and on Sunday afternoons we will graciously come there ourselves and question you about the Carpenter's Son, who had not where to lay his head, and the probable distance of Jericho from Jerusalem. We say to ourselves that the uncomfortably direct Bible texts relative to the poor and to our kinship with them are not intended to be taken literally. There must first be a careful study of surrounding conditions. What was suitable and proper to be done at the opening of the Christian era, and in Judea, is not at all the right thing to do now in these United States, nineteen hundred years later, and amongst a wholly different people. And, crowning argument of all, an attempt to follow out literally the New Testament teachings respecting those whom we have always with us, would infallibly result in upturning the foundations of society. And no doubt such literalism would bring with it just such a result. And the preservation of society is heaven's first law beyond question. Let us do nothing to violate it. After this manner do "the nice people" argue, and so Lazarus is sent around to Protestantism's back-door, the mission chapel, and Dives leans back in his pew and listens graciously when the clergyman admonishes him never to turn his face away from any poor man in order that the face of the Lord may never be turned away from him. Is it any wonder that Lazarus, his soul filled with the scornful reproof of the wealthy and with the despitefulness of the proud, sometimes fails to perceive the great kindness extended to him, and either turns from religion entirely or enters the church that makes him in his rags as welcome as the sinner who dines sumptuously every day ?

American Protestantism has no acknowledged duties to perform to the poor man who is so unfortunate as to be within its pale, if we may judge by its bearing toward him. Judged by its works it is no system of faith for the poor man to cling to, whether he be respectably poor or utterly destitute. Whatever gracious message Protestantism may once have had for him it has none now, to all appearances. For years it has steadily turned its face away from the poor man. Its ears have long been dulled to the voice of the

poor man asking to be recognized as an equal before God in its temples. Its eyes are too dim to see aught of Lazarus but his rags.

Woe unto that faith that has no care for the feeble folk for whom Christ died! Woe unto that faith which preaches the gospel of pre-eminence to the rich and of humble submission to the poor! Woe unto that faith which gives to him that hath, and from him that hath not taketh away even that which he hath! And woe unto American Protestantism because of its pride, its hardness of heart, its "civilized heathenism" that wears the mask of Christianity and crucifies afresh the Master it assumes to adore!

OSCAR FAY ADAMS.